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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 KABUL 002425

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STATE FOR SA/FO (DAS JGASTRIGHT), SA/A, S/CR, SA/PB, S/CT,
EUR/RPM
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SUBJECT: PRT-QALAT - GOVERNOR ARMAN'S FIRST YEAR IN ZABUL:
STRONG LEADERSHIP AND PROGRESS, BUT ALSO FRUSTRATION

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Classified By: DCM RICHARD NORLAND FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Governor Arman has been a strong governor and, overall, Zabul Province has improved over the past year. However, as he well realizes, security and high-level visits are not enough for effective government, and the GoA still lacks the ability to provide goods and services to its citizens here, especially in the more remote districts not on the Ring Road. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) ZABUL PROVINCE BACKGROUND: Zabul Province is poor and backwards even by Afghan standards. It is located in southeastern Afghanistan, and is bordered by Helmand, Uruzgan, Ghazni and Paktika Provinces. It also has a 161 km border with Pakistan. The population estimates range from 258,000 (TF Warrior) up to 444,585 (World News), of whom an estimated 30,000 live in the capital of Qalat. There were 102,000 voters registered for the September 2005 elections. The literacy rate is reportedly 15 percent, which is much higher than provincial officials have indicated to the Provincial Reconstruction Team State Representative (PRTOff). The size is almost 7,000 square miles. The province has remained troublesome since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001 and Governor Arman came here as governor in March 2005.

¶3. (U) ARMAN'S APPROACH TO GOVERNMENT: Arman is a strong governor and has served as a deputy governor, National Security Council (NSC) staff member and mujahideen commander.

He is an engineer by training. Like most GoA officials here, he views Zabul as more ignorant and backwards than the rest of the country.

¶4. (U) While he blames Pakistan for most of the Taliban problems here (as do all our Afghan interlocutors), Governor Arman is objective and understands that lack of reach of the GoA is a separate, albeit related, problem from the Taliban threat. He admits that the GoA is weak out in the districts. He is concerned about its weakness becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, if GoA forces hunker down in district centers, and do not spread out to encounter and oppose the Taliban. As he phrases it, if the Taliban come to a house to demand something, it is either because the GoA is weak there and not providing security or else because that household is pro-Taliban. However, he sees three simultaneous steps as being necessary: in addition to spreading out forces, the GoA must also be providing food or other assistance to villagers, and establishing a relationship with them.

¶5. (C) He openly admits that corruption pervades the GoA and that he is suspicious of most Afghans. Concerning drugs (septel), he is proud of resisting pressure from Kabul to send all large drug seizures to the capital. The procedures, now implemented under the new law, are to send only forensic samples to Kabul and burn the rest of the seizure locally, which he says Kabul officials do not like since they can no longer steal the seized drugs and resell them. PRTOff has observed him at a shura in Shamulzai and at a meeting with Khaki Afghan elders where he appeared visibly angry, accusing them of collaborating with the Taliban, and asking why he should do anything at all for them and their districts.

¶6. (U) The US notion of "separation of church and state"

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is virtually unknown here and would be incomprehensible to most Afghans. Governor Arman is personally very devout, and many of his speeches stress the points that the GoA is an Islamic republic and that education is in accordance with Islam and the Koran -- the bottom line being that the Taliban are wrong and not following Islam correctly.

¶7. (C) WORKING RELATIONSHIPS: President Karzai calls Arman fairly frequently and occasionally summons him to Kabul. The Governor argues his case directly with President Karzai, if he is not satisfied with the Ministry of Interior (MoI) (which has authority over the provincial governors). During his recent meetings in Kabul to address Afghan National Police (ANP) pay arrears of four months, he implicitly threatened to resign, stating he would not go back to Zabul without anything for his ANP officers. That MoI/National Security Council (NSC) meeting resulted in a partial fix of payment of two months, back pay for the ANP officers in the provinces bordering Pakistan.

¶8. (C) Governor Arman cultivates excellent relationships with the PRT and maneuver battalion. He strongly supports Coalition Forces (CF), both philosophically and for the development and assistance that they bring to Zabul. He is very concerned about International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF's) taking over the maneuver battalion. He fears they will be more defensive-oriented, and not go out actively looking for the Taliban in districts like Day Cho Pan.

¶9. (C) He is cordial to the members of the Provincial Council (PC), but does not have much faith in them. (Comment: Objectively, we concur. End Comment.) At one point, he was considering undercutting them by working with select village and district elders, but PRTOff and others recommended against that since the PC members were, after all, democratically elected.

¶10. (C) His relationships with the various directors run

the gamut. On one hand, Arman is very pleased with the new Director of Courts, Judge Qasim, for trying to keep judges and prosecutors honest. He has shown his support by inviting Judge Qasim to help officiate or make speeches at high-level public meetings and ceremonies. (Note: The judge advised PRTOff recently that he had personally transferred two judges he felt were dishonest; as is usual, no one was fired, but they were transferred to other districts where they do not have any influence. End Note.) On the other hand, the Governor has repeatedly expressed his desire to see the Director of Prosecutors removed. Among other things, Arman believes the Director released a Taliban, who had killed a female teacher and sought bribes from prisoners in order to be released.

¶11. (U) SECURITY RECOMMENDATIONS: Governor Arman believes that overall the Taliban is on the run, but has repeatedly pushed his idea for 200 "auxiliary" police in each district for the next year or two; he claims they would not degenerate into militias. Arman respects Colonel Rizak, the ANA kandak commander for the province, as both a mullah and commander (Rizak's nickname is "the fighting mullah," as a mullah who joined the mujahideen and then became an ANA commander). Nevertheless, Arman does not hesitate to offer his own ideas

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on how to improve district security, which combine military and political approaches. Most are very practical, like having sub-district centers in remote, large districts, and having additional patrols and checkpoints along known Taliban infiltration routes.

¶12. (C) PERSONNEL ISSUES: Governor Arman has replaced district governors in Day Cho Pan, Mizan, Shajoy, Shinkay, Shamulzai, Atghar, Arghandab and Suri. He has chastised the Nabahar district governor for spending too much time in Qalat and not enough in his district. (Note: Suri and Nabahar are not yet officially recognized as separate districts of Zabul. End Note.) He has tried to get local input on appointments, using both a carrot and stick approach. If he believes the elders are supportive of the GoA, he will listen to their preferences. If he believes they are dealing with the Taliban, he will read them the riot act, but hint that, if they become supportive of the GoA, he may later replace the district governor with someone preferred by the district elders.

¶13. (C) Arman prefers to move carefully and deliberately when having officials replaced in order to avoid exacerbating problems. When the previous provincial chief of police (CoP) was reassigned last December, the MoI intended to replace him with an allegedly dishonest officer. The Governor could not block the appointment, but secured an agreement from President Karzai that the individual would come by himself, without bringing any cronies with him as his staff. As a result, the individual subsequently declined the appointment, and the Afghan Highway Police (AHP) Chief between Kandahar and Ghazni, General Nabi, became the CoP. He has proven to be an excellent CoP and, in fact, the Governor has lately threatened to resign if General Nabi is replaced. Arman moved a trusted deputy to the Afghan National Border Police (ANBP) in Zanjshir on the Pakistani border several months before having the chief there replaced (Chief Sbeen, whose replacement was one of our PSA recommendations). The Governor encountered resistance to this change, as the ANBP is not actually under his control, but he somehow made it stick.

¶14. (U) Arman has complained that he lacks direct authority over the directors, who report to their respective ministers in Kabul. He also believes strongly that he and other governors should have operational control over the Afghan Highway Police (AHP) and ANBP forces that are stationed within their provinces.

¶15. (U) NASIR-SHAMULZAI LAND DISPUTE: The Governor has been

trying to broker an agreement between the Nasir and the Shamulzai tribes. The Shamulzai took over the Nasirs' land when the latter fled to Pakistan. The Nasirs (about 15,000 people) want to leave Pakistan and return to their land which, legally, they have the stronger claim on. However, to avoid future bloodshed, the Governor wants both sides to negotiate and agree themselves to a resolution, rather than refer the case to the Supreme Court.

¶16. (U) FRUSTRATIONS: The Governor's biggest frustration is the lack of reach by the GoA. Even if the Taliban did not exist, there would still be a virtual vacuum of GoA authority and provision of services once off the Ring Road. Arman

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values visits to the districts to show support and establish a relationship, but also realizes that visits need to be followed up by deliverables of goods and services to enhance GoA authority.

¶17. (U) Governor Arman is also frustrated by the lack of a permanent UN presence, which he believes is necessary to convince NGOs that the province is safe enough for their operations. As a result of the security reputation of Zabul, it is difficult to hire PRT contractors in some districts and UN Office of Project Services (UNOPS) projects have virtually come to a standstill. The Governor and the PRT have been trying since October to convince the UN to establish a permanent presence in Qalat. (Note: They already have a compound here. End Note.) After that, he would like to have a conference of NGOs in order to convince them to establish a presence in Zabul.

¶18. (U) SOME PROGRESS: The Governor noted that, when he first assumed office, he visited Shinkay District. He met with only eight people and they covered their faces to avoid being seen talking with him. Recently, Shinkay hosted a large shura with representatives from several southern districts and warmly greeted Arman, along with five GoA ministers and LTG Eikenberry. Arman also notes the presence today along the border of 70-80 ANBP officers, which did not exist a year ago. He is also proud of his weekly inter-agency security meetings and believes they would be a useful model for neighboring provinces to adopt. Zabul now leads by far in drug seizures (septel), which Governor Arman has made a priority. However, he laments that Kabul does not acknowledge just how much contraband has been seized here or the fact that provincial officials have received threats from drug traffickers as a result.

¶19. (U) In the Governor's estimation, the Ring Road is 80 percent safe and most of the districts in the province are now safe. He is very proud of high-level visits as they demonstrate the relative safety of the province, plus GoA interest in the province. Since last October, President Karzai and five ministers have visited Zabul, the first ever high-level GoA visits to the province. Ambassador Neumann, LTG Eikenberry, and numerous other US and CF officials have also visited Qalat.

¶20. (U) VISION FOR THE FUTURE: The Governor's emphasis is on roads. His master plan for the next few years, which is being implemented through the PRT's master CERP plan, is to have a gravel road loop north and west from the Ring Road in Shajoy, through Khaki Afghan and Arghandab, and then intersect with the Mizan Road (already constructed) which connects back to the Ring Road in Qalat. In the southern part of the province, the master plan is to extend the gravel road from the Ring Road to Shinkay (already constructed) through Shamulzai to the Pakistani border at Zanjshir. That would allow commercial trucking from Pakistan to enter directly at Zanjshir, rather than having to go from Quetta to Spin Boldak and then through Kandahar in order to get on the Ring Road to Qalat and points north, such as Ghazni and Kabul.

¶21. (C) COMMENT: Arman has improved Zabul, although serious

challenges remain. The PRT expects the Governor to ultimately continue on to a higher office, either the

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governorship of a larger province or a cabinet appointment. There had been some speculation he would be reassigned shortly, but now we are hearing that he will remain in Zabul following the next shuffle of governors, which is a good thing for the province. END COMMENT.

122. (U) Dushanbe minimized considered.

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